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SUBJECT: Colombia Shares Lessons from Demobilizing over 51,000

Summary

¶11. President Uribe and Frank Pearl, High Presidential Commissioner for Reintegration and High Commissioner for Peace, launched a document based on Colombia's experience in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) on November 3. The GOC initiative seeks to share with other nations in conflict lessons learned from Colombia's seven years and 51,000 participants in DDR. The GOC has already engaged Haiti, Brazil and the Philippines. The document was based on the First International Congress on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (CIDDR) held in Cartagena May 4-6. End Summary.

Congress on Disarmament,
Demobilization & Reintegration

¶12. On November 3, President Uribe and Commissioner Frank Pearl presented a document produced from the CIDDR that was held in Cartagena on May 4-6 and attended by 1,400 delegates from 40 countries. CIDDR Director Nat Colletta, founding manager of the World Bank's post-conflict unit, said that the CIDDR was not prompted by the international community but inspired by Commissioner Pearl and the GOC. Pearl recognized that Colombia had significant experiences and knowledge to share with nations in post-conflict after Colombia's seven years and over 51,000 participants in the DDR process. The Swedish Ambassador told the audience that Colombia, through CIDDR, is demonstrating how it has become a partner in the international community. The document entitled "The Cartagena Contribution to DDR" is available at cartagenaddr.org.

Colombia Proposes Solutions and Not Problems

¶13. Commissioner Pearl said that Colombia was proud to present its contribution to the world and added, "for the first time, Colombia proposes solutions and not problems." He said that reintegration was the key to DDR and to sustainable peace, and is changing the "essence and face" of Colombia. Pearl emphasized that there is no magic formula, but working with victims and communities is essential along with interagency cooperation and committed investment. Colombia does not pretend to have all the answers and still has a lot to learn, but the GOC felt strongly that other countries struggling with armed conflict should benefit from the lessons of both Colombia's successes and its failures.

GOC Sharing, More Than Just Words

¶14. The GOC recently provided reintegration training to Haiti as part of the UN Peacekeeping team and sponsored two "study tours" for international DDR practitioners who came to Colombia for two-week field-based workshops visiting reintegration centers and productive, education and counseling activities with the demobilized and GOC staff around the country. Commissioner Pearl went to Brazil on November 9 to discuss technical cooperation --most likely bilateral exchange visits. Later this month, he will lead a team to the Philippines (at their request) to share experiences and provide training.

Uribe: 'Democratic Security' Much More than Security

¶15. President Uribe said that reintegration was a key component of his Democratic Security policy. Uribe stressed that physical security for citizens was only the first step in the policy which includes advancing political and individual liberties, human rights, reconciliation, reparations for victims, and economic prosperity. Uribe remarked earlier this year at the CIDDR, "for us the end goal of the Reintegration Policy is not a cemetery or a prison... it is peace."

Three Broad Lessons

¶16. Colletta said the CIDDR involved DDR implementers, beneficiaries and practitioners who had first-hand experience. Colletta identified three broad lessons. First, context matters and DDR programs are not universally applicable. Contextual factors include the economy, the local community and the state's capacity and legitimacy. Second, DDR is a long-term transformative process that requires long-term investment and commitment. Third, reintegration requires a holistic approach where labels of victim and victimizer should be avoided.

Colombian DDR in Numbers

¶17. According to GOC statistics, between August 2002 and April 2009, over 51,000 individuals demobilized. This includes over

35,353 paramilitary, 12,075 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and 2,551 National Liberation Army (ELN) members. The GOC estimates there are currently ten individual demobilizations per day where a member of an illegal armed group escapes and presents him/herself before a civil or military authority. The current rate of return to criminal activity is 7%.

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